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Author(s): Jaroslav Spurny: ``Birds of Steel``]

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Subslug: [Article by Jaroslav Spurny: ``Birds of Steel``]

FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE:

1. [Article by Jaroslav Spurny: ``Birds of Steel``]
2. [Text] In per capita number of war planes Czechoslovakia holds the highest position in Europe. In this respect, only Bulgaria comes close to us. France, Great Britain, or the FRG remain far behind us.
3. The Air Force is at this time our most expensive weapon: One air regiment represents a yearly cost of roughly 1 billion korunas [Kcs]. The expected reduction of war planes should save billions.
4. This military component has one peculiarity as compared to other types of armed forces--no great savings can be achieved by limiting the number of aircraft taking off. Support of flights by ground technology is the same for one plane as it is for 50 planes, whereas in a tank regiment only four machines can be used for training while the others are preserved. The training of pilots is also very costly (about half a billion Kcs). In addition, our Air Force is being nonsensically modernized by purchases of Soviet equipment (this year the military bought six MIG-29, one of which costs Kcs50 million). We are thus totally dependent on the Soviet Union for the delivery of spare parts. In the present situation, when Czechoslovakia is considering leaving the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet representatives could refuse further contracts, and all our Air Force equipment could become useless. Hungary, for example, is taking care of this threat by negotiating imports of military equipment from the West.
5. At present Czechoslovakia has 22 military airfields in use. A big problem is their unbalanced distribution on the territories of both republics: In Slovakia there are only four (a legacy of former strategy oriented toward the West). In addition, people living in Zvolen strongly protest having an airfield close-by in Tri Duby. The airfield in Kosice belongs to a military school; but it is not possible to maintain an establishment of more than 1,000 employees

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for the sake of 15 pilots and 10 navigators. A possible solution is the training of foreign customers, not, of course, the "traditional" Libya or Iraq.

6. The Air Force will probably be cut by half. The number of planes and personnel calculated per capita will thus decline to that of Belgium, the Soviet Union, or Romania. Some airfields will have to be closed down (but the runways will be retained in case there is a military conflict). Ground forces, whose placement in the vicinity of towns is untenable for ecological reasons, could be moved to the airfield areas. These changes will be particularly difficult for the Ministry of Defense, which is strenuously resisting any kind of reorganization. But it certainly will not be able to avoid them; in negotiations on disarmament, the neighboring countries are demanding the removal of military units a certain distance from the common borders. It is important which airfields will be kept because their peacetime arrangement must resemble a wartime one (during peacetime the main task of the Air Force is defending the sovereignty of air boundaries).

7. The geographical location of our country is strategically disadvantageous, and it is practically impossible to design a defense strategy. The Air Force is a very vulnerable component--its equipment can be concealed only with difficulty. In the event of a local conflict with a better equipped adversary it would be destroyed within three days, and we could as quickly destroy a weaker adversary. It is therefore necessary to determine a "reasonable defensive sufficiency" (not a "defensive sufficiency" such as in the United States or the USSR, whose military equipment can checkmate the enemy). Experts should decide the amount of equipment that would be sufficient in respect to potential conflicts and especially to financial possibilities.

8. The Air Force was divided into two components. The first one, with the code designation "VL" was to protect troops "marching toward the Rhine", and the other one--"PVOS"--provided protection for the rear. The quality of the equipment was top rate within the framework of the Warsaw Pact, but from the global point of view only average, including the four air regiments of fighter bombers of a strictly attacking nature about which negotiations are now in progress in Vienna. We shall probably have to reduce their number considerably.

9. The Air Force owns 407 combat aircraft. The most modern of them is the fighter plane MIG-29, which can be armed with air-to-air missiles or with classic bombs. There is practically no civilian use for it; except perhaps for investigating "unidentified flying objects". The MIG-23, equipped with missiles against air and ground

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targets, guns, and bombs, is the most versatile of the combat aircraft. In addition, the Air Force has supersonic bombers SU-22M4, armored fighter planes SU-25K, and transport planes TU-154-B-2. In view of the natural terrain our most needed weapon is the fighter helicopter MI-24 with a four-barrel machine gun, air-to-ground missiles, and guided antitank missiles. It is not dependent on a runway as are planes, and it can be effectively operational within a few minutes. It can be easily put to peace time use, for example during natural disasters.

10. Obviously, the reduction of the Air Force will also affect the pilots. Here we shall have problems. The training is very demanding and expensive. In addition, military pilots comprise a relative unusual group which did not have enough opportunities to become politically compromised. Of 40 generals who underwent clearance proceedings, only two did not pass the verification commission. A similar situation exists in case of pilots of lower rank.

11. The problems of the Air Force cannot be judged separately from the problems of the other components of the Armed Forces. Minister Vacek said at one time that a professional army is too expensive. It seems that an excessive and unnecessarily expensive Air Force does not bother any one.

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